



TechLaunch brings entrepreneurs and university teams from across the Pacific Northwest to practice their pitches for judges from the business/investment community.

INL supports entrepreneurs in statewide business competition

By [Marilyn Whitney](#), INL Communications & Governmental Affairs

Pitchers of all stripes need practice, regardless of whether they're tossing out baseballs or business ideas. To help the latter group, Idaho National Laboratory has partnered with [Idaho TechConnect](#) for the past eight years.

That partnership, and the resulting TechLaunch program, has enabled INL to help hundreds of entrepreneurs from across the Pacific Northwest hone their skills for pitching business ideas. Each spring, the annual program brings competitors who have qualified in their local regions to Boise, where they practice their pitches in front of judges from the business/investment community and compete for prizes in four categories.

The event is just one part of INL's technology-based economic development (TBED) program, which is designed to nurture an entrepreneurial business climate, leverage INL capabilities and foster the transfer of intellectual property to the private sector. INL sponsored the TechLaunch event, and also provided organizational support and judges. Those participating included INL's Economic Development Manager Nancy Bergmann, Jason Stolworthy, deputy director of Technology Deployment, and Dr. Melinda Hamilton, director of Education Programs.



Matt Nicolaysen won the \$10,000 Entrepreneurial Idol competition with his business concept that helps companies engage their fans on smartphones and gaming systems.



The founders of Two by Four Sports plan to use their winnings in the Next Gen competition to help fund their company's next patent.

The judges evaluated pitches and awarded outstanding performance in four areas. The Entrepreneurial Idol competition features companies pitching businesses to a panel of judges that rate both the business viability and presentation. Next Gen is a contest between regional college and university business plan competition teams. And, Idaho Ideas to Market (I2M) involves student teams presenting a market assessment of a patented technology developed at INL.

This year's winner in the Entrepreneurial Idol category and recipient of a \$10,000 prize was Rexburg-based [Appible](#), which helps brands engage their fans on smartphones and gaming systems with officially licensed content.

The Next Gen winner of \$5,000 in cash and legal services was Two by Four Sports, an action sports product development company that uses technology to construct products that simulate snowboarding and skiing on hard surfaces like wood and concrete.

In the I2M competition, Idaho State University took first place, with University of Idaho and Washington State University finishing second and third, respectively.

[Snapshot Postcard](#) won this year's People's Choice award of \$5,000. The Nampa-based company lets users send real picture postcards from their iPhone to any mailing address in the world.

New to this year's competition, TechLaunch and [Boise State University's Student Entrepreneurs Club](#) added a Crowd Pitch competition featuring one minute "elevator pitches" from individual entrepreneurs with the audience selecting its favorite pitch.

INL's TBED efforts foster an entrepreneurial business climate and development of innovative approaches for expanding existing and new enterprises. "Idaho TechLaunch provides a sounding board for entrepreneurs with great ideas," said Bergmann. "The competitors gain invaluable experience and feedback from the judges and have the opportunity to network with other entrepreneurs from the state and region."

Since 2004, 53 innovative companies, who participated in the state finals of TechLaunch, have garnered more than \$33 million in research and development and investment funds. Of those 53 companies, 40 are still in business today.

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[Techconnect Press Release](#)

[Entrepreneurial Idol Elevator Pitches at Idaho TechConnect Youtube Video](#)

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ISU's team took first place this year in the I2M competition where student teams presented their market assessment of a patented INL technology.